

Dealing With Town Hall

From Cape Cod Times

Someday, everyone needs something from town hall. It might be permission to build a mall and then again it might be a beach sticker. In the course of obtaining your particular item you will deal with various individuals. Most are there from a calling to serve, a very few are there because the job entails wielding power. The trouble is that the power this very few wield is sometimes over a vital issue that possibly involves your ability to feed your kids or keep a roof over your head.

This is not a slam on town hall. The people there are trying to administer government to 10's of thousands of unique individuals and are given old buildings, outmoded equipment and a low budget to work with. They handle a lot of no-win situations each day. They tend to be held responsible if something's wrong and taken for granted if it works out right.

In case your mother never told you, Building Inspectors, IRS auditors and divorce lawyers are not hired because they are diplomats. Building inspectors, in particular, stand in the gap between public safety and letting you do what you want. The next time you are sitting in a large place of assembly, such as a church or meeting hall, you can rest assured that people like the building inspector, fire inspector and others have dwelled heavily on how you would survive in a fire. When they turn you down for that third floor, it's probably because you might die in it and then everyone would blame them for not doing their job.

But every once in a great while you get a situation which makes you wonder what they were thinking about.

Some days, a lot of bad acting goes on on *both* sides of the counter at any town hall on the Cape. In fact, somedays, they deserve the oscar. Infrequent as it is, there are times when people behind the counter at town hall will attempt to perpetrate a harder line than the by-laws call for and leave it to you to find the truth. This is a familiar little game, infrequent as it is, in which your property is held hostage until you expend thousands of dollars to get engineered plans which are necessary sit before the board of appeals who can either grant you relief or send you back to you engineers possibly to raise the shrubs an inch. It doesn't happen often, but it happens. And when it does you have absolutely no alternative.

Sometimes the most contentious place on Earth is the Board of Appeals hearing room when there's a controversial issue involving the use of someones property, particularly if they derive their living from that property. On the one hand, The town has rules, on the other the rules were made for people, not vice-versa.